

Questions and Answers about Establishing Machine Shop Village as a Protected District

Introduction

North Andover's Machine Shop Village has a diverse and singular history that can be easily observed through its built environment. The rich texture of cultural, period, and social influences that have led to the construction and adaptation of the town's buildings has produced a sense of place that is unique to this village. Explosive increases in real estate values and development pressures are threatening to obliterate the very characteristics that distinguish our community. In order to strengthen local control and enhance the protection of our heritage, developing a process to protect Machine Shop Village from change that would detract from its character is under consideration. This would culminate in a bylaw passed at Town Meeting to create protections for the neighborhood, in the form of a Local Historic District or Neighborhood Conservation District.

What is the goal of this protection?

It is not the intent of this measure to freeze Machine Shop Village an artificial period setting. A living community changes and adapts according to its contemporary requirements. North Andover, and Machine Shop Village in particular, has a long history of adapting its built environment to suit its current needs. Architectural design guidelines would be offered as a framework within which individual creativity is encouraged while ensuring the continuity of the town's physical and cultural character.

I thought that we were already in a historic district?

Machine Shop Village is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is primarily an honorary designation. Our neighborhood is not protected from substantial change or demolition. By passing a local historic district, the historic character of our downtown area will be much better protected.

What is a protected district?

There are two types of protected districts: Local Historic Districts (LHD) and Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD). The Old Center has a Local Historic District, which is the traditional, but more restrictive method for protecting valuable older districts. The Neighborhood Conservation District is a lower, more flexible level of protection than LHD – more customized to the needs of the neighborhood, exterior only, and only applies for exterior modifications requiring a building permit that are visible from sidewalk. So far, this has only been used in Cambridge, but the state is trying to promote them as a less restrictive way to protect historic areas.

How is a protected district created?

The first step is to find out what residents and property owners think – *that is the purpose of this mailing, so please respond by sending in the postcard*. If there is interest in creating a protected district, a study committee will be created to investigate historic designation further. The study committee, following guidelines set forth by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, holds public meetings, seeks public input, researches the history of the area and prepares a report on their finding. The final step is passage of a protected district bylaw by a two-thirds majority Town Meeting vote.

Who decides how changes are made in the protected district?

The bylaw would describe specifically how the Board of Selectmen will make appointments to a Commission that would govern proposed changes to Machine Shop Village. In other communities in Massachusetts, the commission consists of members such as architects, realtors, residents and property owners of the district.

Who will be affected by this bylaw?

This bylaw would affect property owners within the National Register District boundaries contemplating changes to the exterior architectural features visible from the public way.

If my building is included in the protected district, does it mean I have to make it look more historic?

No, you can maintain the current look of your building as long as you would like. A protected district only reviews proposed changes to exterior architectural features.

How will this affect me?

The proposed design review guidelines make clear that non-historic components and personal preferences such as paint color, landscaping, maintenance and repair work, outdoor furnishings, interior work, signs, storm windows & doors, air conditioners, lighting, and other basic elements of structures are not subject to review. Only significant historic exterior aspects of the structure visible from public ways are affected. Other exemptions can also be included in the bylaw.

How will I benefit from this?

Benefits to homeowners in local historic districts include continuity over time in the appearance and character of the immediate neighborhood. Living in an historic district gives the homeowner a sense of connection to the history of the city. Community involvement in historic districts is usually high, bringing a sense of security and stability to the neighborhood. Additionally, the mature landscape in the public areas of historic neighborhoods brings value to the properties.

I rent in Machine Shop Village, why should I care about this?

Renters have always been integral to the fabric of this neighborhood – many multifamily houses in Machine Shop Village were built for workers in the Machine Shop to rent. Similar to owners, renters have chosen this neighborhood for its unique characteristics, characteristics that should be protected by all. As landlords alter their properties, a better living environment will be created for renters if the alterations are in keeping with the rest of the neighborhood. Renters have a voice - all residents, not just property owners, have a right to vote at Town Meeting on matters that are important to them.

If the residents already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need a protected district?
By having a protected district, you can be assured that a NEW property owner across the street from your place will also maintain the historic character of Machine Shop Village.

How does this process work?

1. When applying for a building permit within the District, the Town will determine whether the proposed work requires review by the governing Commission. If yes, the owner prepares an application to the Commission.
2. When the application is submitted, the Commission is notified and a sub-committee of the Commission reviews the application to see if it can be approved administratively without a hearing. Items which are minor in nature or which clearly conform to the Guidelines of the District will be approved without a hearing. The applicant will be so notified and can proceed with their work.
3. Applications that do require Commission review are scheduled for the next available hearing (the Commission will meet at least once a month). At the hearing, the applicant reviews the proposal with the Commission. If approved, the applicant may proceed. If denied, the applicant has the right to resubmit a proposal that more clearly conforms to the Guidelines. The applicant also has the right to appeal denials to the Superior Court.
4. If complying with the Guidelines creates financial or other hardship to the applicant, the Commission is empowered to allow a variation to those Guidelines and approve the application.
5. Work that proceeds without Commission approval, or varies from an approval granted by the Commission, is a violation, and the Commission has the right to require such work to be brought into conformity.

Isn't this just another level of bureaucracy?

While it is true that an additional step is needed for some projects, the benefits of protecting the rich architectural heritage found in our downtown outweigh this added step. Most of the buildings in Machine Shop Village are over 100 years old. Without a protected district, these gems that have lasted so long could be demolished or irreparably altered tomorrow.

What would happen to the value of my property if a protected district is established?

No one can predict the future, but studies around the country suggest that property values increase faster in local historic districts.

Summary

If North Andover wants to protect our heritage and the beauty of our historic buildings, creating a protected district is the best answer. Over 120 towns across the state have adopted similar districts. We all feel the loss of something special as buildings we cherish are torn down or rehabbed beyond recognition. We have come to an important point in the town's history where we can, and must, do something to protect our future by better preserving our past.